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REVIEW and OUTLOOK

Calmness in Crisis

Perhaps the first thing to be said about the President's speech the other evening is that he supplied an ingredient hitherto sadly lacking in the Government's statements about the spy-plane incident.

At the root of the anxieties many people, here and abroad, have felt about that affair was the impression that it was a hodgepodge of confusion and contradiction. Both the dispatch of the plane and the handling of the event afterwards had about them an air of improvisation rather than something undertaken after careful thought and the weighing of consequences.

Mr. Eisenhower may not have allayed all those anxieties, but the calmness, dignity and sobriety of his explanation must have given all his listeners at least a sense of confidence that this enterprise was not undertaken carelessly and thoughtlessly. His argument for the need of intelligence-gathering such as photographing Russia, as his explanation of its value, was indeed strong.

Equally impressive, and of more basic importance, was the reasoned viewpoint Mr. Eisenhower carried into his comments on future relations with Russia. And this is in marked contrast to two current attitudes toward the Kremlin in the post-summit world.

In one view the Soviet proved conclusively at Paris that any agreeableness is only a temporary cover for belligerence; therefore the U.S. should now be belligerent in turn—build up defenses, cut off the arms talks, dump the cultural and other exchange programs and generally disdain any further Soviet overtures.

At the other extreme is the notion that we should go to lengths that smack of appeasement in our efforts to reach understandings with the Soviets. This is symbolized in the criticism that the President could have saved the summit if he had apologized; also in Senator Kennedy's call for another summit soon after January 20.

The dangers in either course should hardly require elaboration. Belligerence on our part runs the risk of at some time provoking the Russians into rash action. Not only that; it cuts off the possibility of capitalizing on any hopeful changes within the Soviet Union. In any case, belligerence ill becomes our stance in this struggle. We are the defenders of Western civilization, not the barbarian aggressors.

The contrary course of showering the Soviets with concessions and cajoling them into new summit conferences, will only impress them with our seeming weakness, which they will do their best to exploit. Such an approach, moreover, distorts the nature of the struggle; it is up to the Soviets, the trouble-makers, to make concessions if they want a better world, not to the people who are only trying to go their way in peace.

President Eisenhower, to his credit, chose neither of these courses. Despite Khrushchev's verbal pyrotechnics, he predicted no doom around the corner. Indeed, he carefully noted that Khrushchev did not go beyond invective; that is, the Soviet leader hurled no essentially new threats and left himself free to pursue either a soft or a hard line or an alternation of both.

The President proposed no great convulsions of our society in order to deal more effectively with the Soviet "challenge." Our defenses—the most potent on earth—will of course be continually improved for the long pull but not violently overhauled with every zig in the Soviet line; they will be neither "neglected in complacency nor overbuilt in hysteria."

This then is a policy of firmness without belligerence. The President's corollary for the future is business-like negotiation without appeasement. "We conduct . . . negotiations not on the basis of surface harmony nor are we deterred by any bad deportment we meet. Rather we approach them as a careful search for common interests between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union on specific problems."

What this means is that one doesn't try to tackle specific problems by first creating a phony air of good will at a summit conference. First you tackle the problems, as at the Geneva conferences on a nuclear test ban and broader disarmament, and you tackle them coldly and without illusions. You tackle them only because it is possible that at some point a pragmatic common interest—without even beginning to bridge the ideological gulf—can emerge between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

The President's approach—a firmness that avoids either belligerence or appeasement—is essentially the Eisenhower policy from the beginning of the Administration. Its virtue lies not only in its intrinsic dignity; it is also a policy the U.S. can pursue whether the Soviets take a soft line or a hard line. It is made in America, not in Russia.

It will satisfy neither the fire-eaters nor the milquetoasts. And that may be its greatest virtue of all. For it should succeed in calmness in crisis and cool common sense in dealing with a dangerous adversary.